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**THE STUDY OF THE OLD BALLADS
IN THE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL**

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“I know that he who walks in the way these following ballads point, will be manful in necessary fight, fair in trade, loyal in love, generous to the poor, tender in the household, prudent in living, plain in speech, merry upon occasion, simple in behavior and honest in all things.”

—Sidney Lanier.

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THE STUDY OF THE OLD BALLADS IN THE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

The ballad is a form in literature rich in meaning and of educative worth. It can give us a fine old tale in such a way as to have power "to instruct, to uplift, and to delight," and it can take us into the very life of the far-away people whose first literature it was. This it can do because it is the most democratic of any form of literature and therefore the closest to the life of any literature of its time. It has in it an element that belongs to youth, for, like the fairy and folk tale, it is filled with the spirit of the youth of the race. Furthermore, it expresses that youth in its exalted, song-making mood,—a mood responsive not alone to one art impulse but three—music and song and dance. In what the old ballads have kept of perennial freshness and freedom and in the story of their making they are a means whereby youth of today may share in the freedom of their time and world. That such may be the result of the reading and study of ballads in the school, it must be the interest of the teacher not only to make them enjoyed as stories and as poetry but also appreciated for their meaning in the life of the race—appreciated as *folk* poetry.

CHARACTER OF THE OLD BALLADS OF FOLK POETRY

That they may have for one this fullness of meaning they need to be clearly distinct in one's mind from other forms of poetry. It is not enough to know that the old ballad is a "simple, spirited poem in which some popular story is graphically narrated," or that it has, too, a quality of 'strangeness' that gives it unexplainable charm. In varied ways *The Pied Piper*, *Lucy Gray*, and *The Lady of Shalott* have these qualities finely. Wherein, then, is the old ballad different? Of these poems we could almost have said, had we not known, that Browning wrote the first and Wordsworth and Tennyson the others. But who wrote *Sir Patrick Spens*? Of no author does it remind us. It seems only 'an old ballad.' The result of all the research of scholarship has been but to place the word *anonymous* below every genuine old ballad; yet this it is that gives the old ballad its charm—its anonymous company of makers. We need to know, however, that *anonymous* means not the colorless, disappointing thing it is to-day below a poem, that rather it is rich with its suggestion of a singing, dancing, listening throng—peasant and minstrel and lady and page, the company on the village green, beside the cottage fire, at the harvest gathering or May Day festival; a company not of one time or place, for the ballad is a plastic thing and is "ever in the making."

For a typical scene of ballad making we shall need to go back to the time before the printer's art and to a community life more communal than any pictured by social idealist of the present,—a time when there was a single standard of life from prince to ploughboy, a sharing of all in adventure and social life, when ideas were common property and no maker of a song thought to add his name to his song. Suggestive is this fragment of an old Breton ballad—

“This song was made on the eve of Lady Day after supper;
It was made by twelve men, dancing on the knoll by the chapel.
Three are ragpickers; seven sow the rye; two are millers.
And so it is made, O folk, so it is made, this song!”

Such a scene implies a company gathered together with the freedom of an outdoor pastime, a unity of feeling, a common delight in song and dance and with the stimulus of a fresh interest. It may be one brings in news of a combat, of a disaster at sea, tells a tale of romantic adventure or starts a greenwood song. As the tale goes round and is repeated, it begins to become rhythmical. One of the group sings a stanza, the others take it up line by line and make a refrain, then another adds a stanza, and another, and the crowd respond. Or it may be the first singer is the more gifted and improvises stanza after stanza, the throng joining in with a refrain. Again and again at other times is the song sung with additions and changes, going from one part of the country to another, perhaps from land to land, sung by generation after generation, yet, with all of its variations, still keeping the same kernel of story. Even in corners of our own land today we find fresh versions of these same old English and Scottish ballads, kept alive in the same old-time fashion. Indeed we may parallel with these scenes those that have pictured to us how negro melodies were made, how some event in the lives of Kentucky mountaineers was celebrated, or those among western cowboys that resulted in the unique songs by which they quieted their cattle or varied the monotony of the campfire—all a floating literature of song like this old ballad literature. But the old ballad was born of the people and made for the people as no song of our time can possibly be. Therefore was it a “popular ballad,” a ballad of the folk.

Furthermore, in almost as democratic a way as their origin, the ballads came into print. It is easy to understand that as life grew less simple and became more artificial with varying and dividing standards, the song-making folk came gradually to lose their power of improvisation and the minstrel became one of a recognized class of song makers. He may have been the one in the group most gifted, whose stanzas were most often caught up by the singing throng, and later have become the professional song maker, in his wanderings adding ballad after ballad to his sheaf of song whereby he might gladden hall of lord or wayside group. But when his brave days were over and he came to be classed with “rogues, vagabonds, and sturdy beggars,” the ballad still lived on, sung by the “blind crowder in the streets,” by

“The spinsters and the knitters in the sun,
And the free maids that weave their thread with bones,”

by old women in the Highlands beside their cottage fires, such as the one who cried out on Scott's collecting them for print, "Ye have spoilt them atehither. They were made for singing and no for reading, but ye have broken the charm now and they'll never be sung mair." And so it has been; but their death as popular song had begun even before these days of collecting when they were printed on broadsides and sold at fairs and street corners by a hawker or "flying stationer," such a one as may sometimes be heard even to-day at some wrestling meet in the north of England, crying through the crowd, "New song, a penny! New song, a penny!" We read that song lovers of the time made collections, or "garlands" of ballad broadsides and later of the penny chap books of ballads similar to the chap books of familiar stories that finally made their way into the hands of children. But the great event for modern interest in old ballads was Bishop Percy's finding of a manuscript book of old ballads "lying dirty on the floor, under a Bureau in ye Parlour; being used by the Maids to light the fire—a scrubby, shabby paper book." This, printed in 1765, makes our first published collection of old ballads. With the various later collections by Scott and others and the more recent great work of Professor Child of Harvard University, whose collection includes also comparisons from among the ballads of other lands, we have a rich balladry that is more and more getting from the books of scholars into the books for children.

The story of the making of ballads suggests their content and their character as poetry. We know they must tell of elemental interests of the people, the great realities for them, involving ideals that are the universal realities today. Whether they tell of border raid or outlaw life or fairy romance, they tell too of faith and courage, of danger and mystery met in the spirit of every day, death accepted as naturally as life and met in simple, brave hearted ways. Again, they are stories, as we should expect them to be, vivid, direct, beginning in the midst of things, going quickly and surely to their culmination, leaving the reader with a flash of the story, as it were, an impression of human life that abides like a real experience. This wholeness and vividness of effect they have from their structure as folk poetry—their process of making in crystallization—suggested through what has been called their "leap and linger" manner of constant addition and repetition, their dramatic questions and answers, their intensifying refrains, their unstudied picturesqueness by which they tell more than they say, by single word or phrase have power to flash a scene before one so that one girl's spontaneous appreciation of a ballad, "I like it for what isn't in it," is a true estimate of ballad art in tribute to its fine power of suggestiveness. And literally are they singing poetry, quickening to an almost physical, rhythmic response, so that they seem in truth "tales telling themselves" on the lips of a dancing, singing, improvising throng.

MEANING OF THEIR FOLK ORIGIN IN THE TEACHING OF BALLADS

In teaching any poem, of first necessity is it to so present it that a pupil get from it a unified impression that will make it have for him one distinct meaning and emotional appeal, and that from the first it have fresh interest for him as poetry. To this end the teacher herself must know its truth of form as well as content and delight in it, must joyously sense its fine art, its plan that makes it a perfect whole, its parts related in harmony, in every way responsive to the informing spirit and meaning, the poetic idea. But a ballad she must teach not only as a poem, but as a ballad with full appreciation of its ballad art. Therefore the art of teaching a ballad must look back to the art of its making. This it is that suggests the spirit in which it should be taught and the kind of response to be given it. Moreover, each ballad should be taught according to its own individual character, that which makes it of specific worth and interest among ballads.

For these ends of ballad study a teacher may not choose at random among the ballads, even among those in the various collections published for school use. Until recently these have been made with reference largely to the interests and imaginative experiences of pupils older than those in the grades. The ideal ballad book for children is of necessity a small one containing ballads worth reading and rereading, some of them worth intimate study, some worth learning by heart, ballads that meet their experience and interest and widen them out in wholesome ways. In a school that possesses a print shop, perhaps this ideal ballad book may best be one made by the teacher and pupils themselves in as nearly the old time manner as our modern time can achieve, by printing single ballads in the fashion of the broadsheet or of the chap book and later binding these together to make the completed book or 'garland' of old ballads.

THE GREENWOOD BALLADS

A group of ballads with which we may begin, not because they are the greatest but because they very naturally meet and widen out present interests of children and are easily suggestive of the way in which ballads were made, is the group of greenwood, outlaw ballads. They carry on and enrich the interests children already may have from their reading of Howard Pyle's *The Merry Adventures of Robin Hood*. Like it they appeal to their love of outdoor life, their natural impatience of the restraint of authority, their love of the 'scrap', of adventure, lawless mischief and playing a joke, and of the 'gang interest'. Like it, too, they may help to transform these various instincts into ideals of a just democracy, of comradeship and loyalty to a leader and the idea for which he stands, of social service and helpfulness, of courage and, it may be, blitheness of spirit in the face of danger, of the clever meeting of an occasion through one's wits, of a wholesome sense of humor, the standard of fair fight, and the ability to meet defeat generously.

STUDY OF *Robin Hood Rescuing the Widow's Three Sons*

Of these greenwood ballads, one of the most typical and suggestive for ballad study is *Robin Hood Rescuing the Widow's Three Sons*. It is a ballad of merry mood and serious meaning. Looking at it from our day it is easy to call it a ballad of democracy, to hear in it the voice of social England finding expression, to think of Robin Hood as asserting the rights of the common people against the might of a privileged aristocracy, in his own time and way setting up the standard of the 'square deal,' sending forth the cry for social justice in the blasts from his "little small horn." Its individual charm comes from the impression it gives of light-heartedness and earnestness, an impression with which every detail of its art is in harmony. Look first at the situations: Robin Hood in buoyant, adventuresome mood, in the "merry month of May", meeting the poor widow sorrowing for her sons condemned to death; his coming upon the "silly old man" and gay offer of exchange of garments; his ironical fooling of the sheriff bringing about the quick turning of justice by the sheriff's own command. Because of this spirit of light heartedness the culmination in the last stanza lacks the air of tragedy it would otherwise have, for the sheriff seems what he is in the ballads generally, less an individual than a stupid stock character, a symbol of the oppression of unjust law. In keeping, too, with this spirit, is the picturesqueness of the poem. It begins in the greenwood with the spirit of the greenwood, and returns there when the "tripping attendants" take the law into their own hands. In between we see the highroad, the 'open road' of the common people with its story of their life. There we see the old woman "weeping along the way," the beggar with his strange clothes and bags for begging, and finally come to Nottingham town, centre of Norman oppression for Sherwood people, with its scene of the sheriff aghast at the beggar's nimbleness in jumping "from stock to stone." And all through is before one the merry figure of Robin, a figure belonging to the greenwood, the incarnation of the springtime spirit and of the democratic freedom of the highway.

In every other detail of form is the ballad true to its spirit and central impression. The way the story gets told is the lively, humorous-serious dramatic one of question and answer and dialogue, that seems a natural result of its manner of making. It is interesting to note how these successive questions and answers, suggestive of the singing throng, make the dramatic situations, showing a growing of interest, having a cumulative effect somewhat as in the folk tale:

Robin Hood asks—

"What news? what news, thou silly old woman?

What news hast thou for me?"

Said she, "There's my three sons in Nottingham town

To-day condemned to dee."

"O, what have they done?" said Robin Hood.

I pray thee tell to me."

"It's for slaying of the king's fallow-deer,
Bearing their long bows with thee."

"Come change thy apparel with me, old man,
Come change thy apparel for mine."

"O, thine apparel is good," he said,
And mine is ragged and torn."

Then of the sheriff Robin asks—

"And what will you give to a silly old man
To-day will your hangman be?"

"Some suits, some suits," the sheriff, he said,
"Some suits I'll give to thee."

Again Robin—and the dialogue becomes ironical—

"I have a horn in my pocket,
I got it from Robin Hood,
And still when I set it to my mouth,
For thee it blows little good."

"O wind thy horn, thou proud fellow,
Of thee I have no doubt.
I wish that thou give such a blast,
Till both thy eyes fall out."

Then after the blasts 'both loud and shrill'—

"And who are these," the sheriff he said,
"Come tripping over the lea?"

"They're my attendants," brave Robin did say;
"They'll pay a visit to thee."

From an appreciation of the structure of ballads like this, one may readily see wherein the old ballads were a natural preparation for the rise of the drama in England, their spirit more in keeping with the spirit of the common people than the morality play of the church.

The suggestion of the improvising, singing throng and the cumulative effect felt in the dialogue of the ballad, are apparent, too, in the different kinds of repetition in keeping with its general spirit of liveliness. We find them in Robin's questions, "What news? what news?", in the details of his dressing up in the beggar's clothes, and another kind still in the stanza—

"I've a bag for meal, and a bag for malt,
And a bag for barley and corn;
A bag for bread, and a bag for beef,
And a bag for my little small horn."

Again is there a true ballad kind of repetition in the stanzas that bring the climax—

"The first loud blast that he did blow,
He blew both loud and shrill;

A hundred and fifty of Robin's men
Came riding over the hill.

The next loud blast that he did give,
He blew both loud and amain,
And quickly sixty of Robin Hood's men
Came shining over the plain."

Indicative of the light heartedness of the group that sang the ballad is the refrain, "With a link, a down, and a day." We hear it at the beginning of each new situation, as if marking the progress of the story, giving a touch more of mischief and merriment at the coming discomfiture of the Sheriff, seeming to express so truly in its unmeaning words and buoyant lilt, the spirit of the time of year, that one can almost believe the theory that makes Robin the sprite, or spirit, of the green-wood.

In one other detail of form—and perhaps the most important—is felt this springtime spirit. Its rhythm is the typical ballad rhythm, but it is also, in harmony with the ballad story, a singing, Maytime rhythm. Merely from the impulse imparted by the movement of the lines, is it easy to see the dancing company on the green, as in—

"But the merriest month in all the year
Is the merry month of May;"

and

"Now Robin Hood is to Nottingham gone
With a link, a down, and a day."

Whatever other response the children may give to the ballad, we know they cannot fail to respond to its happy ballad rhythm. Is there any reason then, after they have naturally given this response, why they should not know in a simple way the meaning of ballad rhythm and the reason for its special gayety in this ballad? It is easy to appreciate the effect of regularity in the first two lines,

"There are twelve months in all the year,
As I've heard many say;"

and to feel the added lilt, the quickening impulse in keeping with the thought, from the introduction of the extra light syllable in the lines that follow:

*"But the merriest month in all the year,
Is the merry month of May.*

Now Robin Hood *is to Nottingham gone
With a link, a down, and a day.*"

Intensifying the liveliness of the rhythm are the rhymes, with their predominance of light, glad sounds—*day, May; we, thee; red, bread; wist, list; shrill, hill; see, be; glen, men*—that share in making the form of the ballad true to its singing Maytime spirit.

An appreciation of the rhythm shows the necessity of reading a ballad aloud and in the reading giving some suggestion of it as the singing poetry it originally was. We naturally accent the rhythm rather strongly, somewhat as in repeating *Mother Goose Rhymes*, naturally, too, sometimes wrenching the accent to keep up the movement as in the lines,

“Here is forty shillings in good silver,”
and
“O wind thy horn, thou proud fellow.”

A teacher who appreciates the importance of the rhythm, who finds delight in it herself and has skill to show it in expressive reading, can reveal fresh, unexpected meaning and enjoyment in ballads to children with their ready response to rhythm and tendency to singsong reading. Added chance for expressive reading is given by the dramatic character of the ballad with the opportunity it gives for individuals and groups in the class to take the parts of characters, the material calling naturally for free, spirited expression.

How much an understanding of details of form should be included in this study depends on how much they contribute to the enjoyment of the ballad by the class and their living in it, a result that would vary with the character of a class and the skill of a teacher. They make so large a share in the interest of the ballad and are so vitally related to its spirit and meaning that an appreciation of them might readily be a revealing experience. Natural, first, would be the response to its form as a whole, its three parts, each introduced by the refrain, each presenting its special situation, developing it in similar ways to its own culmination, the culmination in each leading to the situation and culmination following, each part distinct but sharing in the perfect whole—all showing plan, the true and perfect organization, that is a necessity in art. It is easy for a class to see how naturally and inevitably the story grows and thereby understand what it is that makes a story—an idea of permanent worth. What is the opening situation? Why has it meaning, why a situation? What would they have Robin do? Why must he do it? Being the person he is, how will he do it? Where is his chance? What is his spirit in doing it? What gives him the triumph? With delight in the story may come delight in the harmony of details. How does the ballad as a whole express the spirit of Robin in his adventure? What pictures remain with them? How does the story seem to “tell itself?” What is the spirit of the movement whereby the ballad seems to “sing itself?” If with interest in the ballad story comes spontaneous delight in its form, then has the ballad been a means of recalling the beauty and joy of art, even if it be only elementary art. And delight in the art of a ballad may mean, not only interest in other ballads and the story of ballad making, but a delight in poetry as poetry and all that this means as a resource in life.

OTHER ROBIN HOOD BALLADS

Others of the Robin Hood ballads may now be read by the class or by the teacher to them, the new interest of ballad form giving opportunity for a pleasant reliving of old stories familiar from Howard Pyle's version. There is the romantic ballad of *Robin Hood and Allin A Dale* to be enjoyed for its bright picture of "the youngster in scarlet red" "chaunting a roundelay," of the "finikin lass" that "did shine like the glistening gold," of the harper's disguise and Little John in the Bishop's coat working confusion in the wedding and making things come out right, all giving the *Ivanhoe* type of picture of "merrie England". We would read *Robin Hood and Little John* for the ballad version of Robin's generosity and genius for comradeship; perhaps, too, *The Little Gest of Robin Hood* because it is the largest in scope of the Robin Hood ballads, the longest and nearest to an epic in form, the teacher, however, summarizing parts in her reading. And surely we would read *Robin Hood's Death and Burial* wherein we see bold Robin come to his end, not at all as we would have him, but brave and chivalrous still, keeping up his free greenwood spirit to the last---

"Lay me a green sod under my head,
And another at my feet;

And lay my bent bow by my side.
Which was my music sweet;
And make my grave of gravel and green,
Which is most right and meet."

The children should be familiar with the beautiful edition of these ballads illustrated by Lucy Fitch Perkins, for the quaint pictures with their bright coloring thoroughly in harmony with the spirit of the ballads.

Should the questions come now, Who was Robin Hood? When did he live? Why were songs made about him? the time has come for their answer. And the answer may be made without necessarily doing violence to the reality of Robin Hood as a popular hero. The children themselves may enjoy the responsibility of looking up the various theories in regard to the existence of Robin Hood and drawing their own conclusions. Whether he was outlaw yeoman, political leader, the last of the Saxons to keep the spirit of independence, or whether he was an improbable myth connected with the story of Woden, or "Robin of the Wood," the spirit, or sprite, of the greenwood, the class may still realize that he was more real to the people of England than many a hero whose dates are chronicled with accuracy, as clearly a personage as King Arthur because he meant as true a type, representing Saxon justice and democratic independence against Norman injustice and authority as Arthur represented kingship and order in a realm of chaos and strife.

RELATION TO OTHER INTERESTS OF THE SCHOOL

Since the happenings of the Robin Hood ballads seem all to have come in the "merry month of May," the ideal time for their reading is the spring, when there may be the accompanying interest of the May Day games and frolics such as were formerly connected with these ballads and suggest how both were a social outgrowth. Information about their connection with English life may be found in Chambers's *Book of Days*, in Strutt's *Sports and Pastimes* or other books on games, and of the part of the Robin Hood characters in these games, in Gutch's collection of Robin Hood ballads. With this interest, too, may be related the work in illustration and composition. The old prints, the drawings of Howard Pyle, of Lucy Fitch Perkins and others are suggestive of the chance they offer for illustration and color work, so distinct and simple are these characters and the situations. With the May Day games may come naturally the little plays and songs the ballads give opportunity for, made in the composition classes. A full dramatization of *Robin Hood Rescuing the Widow's Three Sons*, weaving in imagined incidents, conversations, and even songs suggested by the ballad story, would stimulate originality and appreciation of alive and true expression as well as more vivid living in the ballad itself and clearer understanding of conditions in ballad times. The class would have interest, too, in inventing a new situation for Robin Hood, a new problem for which they must find a Robin Hood kind of solution. Or the teacher may give the situation from an old ballad, read, say, the first part of *Robin Hood and the Curtal Friar* and let the class develop the situation by making a play in the composition class, to be acted later. Perhaps, instead, they may attempt to finish the story in ballad style, or, if material offers, make an original ballad, afterward, should there be the necessary equipment in the school, printing their ballads in broad-sheet form with their own woodcut illustrations, thus making still more of a combination of interests such as was made when the eighth grade boys in one school printed a dramatization made by the sixth grade of the ballad story of *Kinmont Willie*. Also the revived interest in Robin Hood gives chance for independent oral expression in sustained talks and discussions of real worth and interest to older pupils on questions that may naturally arise, as: If Robin Hood's band were in our land today what would they seek to do? What means would they take to bring about social justice? How did they differ from a band of outlaws today? What connection have these ballads with such modern interests as the Boy Scouts' movement?

This is the time, too, for other pictures in literature of ideal outlawry, some of them still concerned with these characters, as the chapter in *Ivanhoe* that gives the story of Locksley and the archery contest. Comparisons may be made to the old plays of Robin Hood for their homely interest and possibly to certain scenes and passages in the modern drama of *Sherwood*, by Alfred Noyes, that makes one feel the spell of the forest, showing a fairy world and the bright promise of

Robin Hood as a social reformer. Interesting for outside reading is *The Black Arrow* of Stevenson, giving a picture of a greenwood outlaw band attempting to bring about justice in the time of the Wars of the Roses. *Adam Bell, Clym of the Clough, and William of Cloudesley*, a greenwood ballad of other characters, is worth reading not only for comparison, but for its character of a brave woman and its apple shooting incident suggestive of the Tell story. One would not forget the enrichment and the idealizing influence that a study of lyrics can give: Keats's merry jingle, *Robin Hood*, the song from *As You Like It* that seems Robin Hood's own song, "*Under the greenwood tree*," the beautiful lines by Alfred Noyes in the lyric *Sherwood* that seem to have caught the springtime spirit of the old ballads and to be calling England afresh to assert her natives rights—

"Merry, merry England is waking as of old,
With eyes of blither hazel and hair of brighter gold;
For Robin Hood is here again beneath the bursting spray,
In Sherwood, in Sherwood, about the brink of day."

And there is our more rugged *Song of Marion's Men* to connect the best in the old tales with our own story of patriotism.

THE HEROIC BALLADS.

Study of Sir Patrick Spens.

A group of ballads of still higher worth are the heroic ballads. They are such as prove the truth of Professor Gummere's statement that the ballads "came from men who knew life at its hardest, faced it, accepted it, well aware that a losing fight is at the end of every march." Of this type of ballad none is of finer strain or better worth detailed study than the ballad of *Sir Patrick Spens*. Of its eighteen versions, the one of most power is one of the shortest. Its power of vital suggestion, its power as art, is evident when we compare it with a statement of the mere facts of the story as they have been summarized in a paragraph of information:

"A king of Scotland, wishing to send a new ship to Norway, inquired for a skillful captain. Sir Patrick Spens being praised as the best sailor afloat, the king gave the commission to him. Though appreciating the honor, Sir Patrick knew so well the dangers of navigation at that season that he suspected treacherous influences on the king. Nevertheless summoning his men promptly he set sail in spite of their forebodings. The embassy of Scotch lords whom he carried was ill prepared for hardship; and all, passengers and navigators alike, were drowned half way to Aberdour." As Professor Baldwin adds, "That is not story at all, but merely something out of which a story might be made." It little tells the unflinching heroism or suggests the far-reaching tragedy, the human story with its revelation of the ideal that the art of the old ballad has kept living and full of meaning for men and women through the centuries and for us today.

By what art does the ballad do this? One way is by the true ballad art of leaping into the midst of the action, going forward in the heart of it with such vivid, swift directness to the inevitable end, that we see the action as a whole and live in it. We are asking, Why did the king call for 'a guid sailor'? Why did he wish 'to sail his ship' just then? We are not told, but straightway comes the treacherous suggestion, then the fatal royal command, the foreboding, unhesitating setting forth and the final disaster, flashed before us in tragic contrast to the banquet spirit of the opening lines. And why is this end inevitable? Why, too, has the ballad lived to be even today "the grand old ballad" Coleridge called it, if it is but the record of an unavailing struggle against an unnecessary doom? These are questions a class can answer when they have faced the others involved: Should Sir Patrick Spens have chosen otherwise? In those days what were the highest virtues of men and heroes? Would the ballad have been sung far and wide with ever fresh appeal if it had ended otherwise? And what is the impression we keep with us? Is it that of the needlessness of the tragedy? Or of the stout-hearted hero with his sense of impending doom, loyal to his king's command, meeting death as a brave man should? Scholars tell us that the ballad bears out fairly well the story of a ship-wreck in the time of Alexander III when many Scottish knights and nobles perished. One likes to think that the ballad has some historical accuracy, that Sir Patrick Spens was one of those heroes of patriotic story who found "the path of duty the way to glory", in spirit akin to those "noble four hundred" who went to their end with loyal obedience though knowing that "some one had blundered." And one likes to think, too, that there is an ideal justice in poetry whereby through the centuries Sir Patrick Spens has come to his own. If, as Carlyle said, "all education is but learning the meaning of great words," then is this brave old ballad of inestimable worth in giving meaning for youth to the great words, *courage* and *loyalty*.

The ballad art of directness is also an art of vivid directness. The scenes are flashed before us in such a way that we see "not only the word but verily the thing." Ask a class how they know the story and they will tell it by pictures: the king "in Dumfermline towne, drinking his bluid red wine," Sir Patrick reading the letter "walking on the strand," the warning of "the new moon with the auld moon in her arm," the sudden storm, the sea high and dark about, the terror of the Scots nobles "richt laith to weet their cork-heild schoone"; the waiting ladies "with their fans into their hand" and their "gowd kaims in their hair," and the final picture of "guid Sir Patrick Spens wi' the Scots lords at his feet." It is not easy to find another poem of the same length that shows its events with more appealing concrete reality than this with its pictures of a line or phrase or single word, or that is more worth careful study for a knowledge of the picturing, suggesting power of words.

The ballad art is evident too in the way the question and answer method of telling the story is in keeping with the dignity of a heroic

tragic situation. The king's question and the ready answer of the "eldern knight" lead to Sir Patrick's foreboding question—

"O who is this has done this deed—
This ill deed done to me,
To send me out this time o' the year
To sail upon the sea?"

answered by the prompt command—

"Mak' ready, mak' ready, my merry men a',"

this in turn by the seaman's warning fear of "a deadly storm" that gives full meaning to "this time o' the year." In keeping, too, with the tone of tragedy is the ballad art of lingering and yet of intensifying the impression by repetitions, sometimes of single words, "late, late yestreen," "I fear, I fear," or "lang, lang," sometimes of lines that make a cumulative effect as in—

"The first line that Sir Patrick read
A loud laugh laughed he;
The next line than Sir Patrick read
A tear blinded his ee.
'O who is this has done this deed
This ill deed done to me?'"

or of whole stanzas as those two that picture the weary waiting of the ones at home.

An appreciative reading aloud shows the rhythm in harmony with the character of the story. Easily flowing and spirited, it is yet without the merry, dancing lilt felt in the Robin Hood ballads partly from the less frequent insertion of the extra syllables quickening the lines. Something of contrast is felt between the first part and the last, the movement becoming more slow at the suggestion of the storm, slower still with a sobering, dirge-like effect in the last stanzas in which the repetition becomes a sort of refrain—

"O lang, lang may the ladies sit
With their fans into their hand.

* * * *

O lang, lang may the ladies stand
With their gowd kaims in their hair,"

and before the final tragic picture—

"Half owre, half owre to Aberdour."

As in the pictures and rhythm, the poem grows foreboding, too, through the very sounds of the words chosen, by their tone telling of the coming calamity, ominous in the effect of their succession and play upon each other as in the lines that show the coming storm:

"When the lift grew dark and the wind blew loud,
And gurlly grew the sea."

A class that reads the last line expressively will hardly need the assurance of a dictionary to picture and feel the meaning of the word "gurly." In the stanzas following, the tragic meaning of the contrasting gayer pictures is sharply suggested by the repeated, lingering sound in "lang, lang" at the beginning of each and the words "na mair" at the end, poignant of the weary, wistful waiting and longing, more so perhaps than the heavier English equivalent, "no more." And there are times in reading the poem when one's stimulated imagination may seem to bring to the ears the mournful sound of a wind-blown sea knell from the sounds in the line,

"Half owre, half owre to Aberdour."

It is easy to push this sort of interpretation too far, but a teacher needs to feel the artistic truth of a poem even in the harmony of its sounds. A reading that responds to its emotional appeal must take account of its sounds. A vivid living in the story would naturally call out a true expression of them and true expression in reading, in turn, make for more real living in the story.

The worth of this old ballad story and its individual ballad form may be appreciated by comparison with a modern poem frankly imitative, like it in material and form but differing in tragic motive. We know that *The Wreck of the Hesperus* came directly as a result of Longfellow's studies in ballad poetry, though its immediate inspiration was a violent storm and the account of an actual shipwreck on the reef of Norman's Woe. It is one of the best of ballad imitations, keeping as it does the ballad rhythm, sometimes wrenching the accent in the primitive fashion, telling its story in the objective ballad manner of question and answer and dialogue, by ballad repetitions, by its pictures that linger long in one's mind from their wonderful reality of a storm at sea. It is similar to the older ballad in its general plan, the setting forth in the face of a deadly storm and a spoken warning, the sudden terrible reality, the disastrous end. One of its stanzas seems openly imitative—

"Last night the moon had a golden ring,

But now no moon we see.

I pray thee, put into yonder port

For I fear a hurricane."

It is like it, too, in its sense of the inevitableness of fate. But more is it in contrast to the rugged older ballad: the occasion for going out is not a king's behest but the skipper's will; the impression of character amid the storm is not of a stout-hearted seaman but of a pathetic child victim; the impression left in the mind is purely one of pathos, not of courage illuminating tragedy.

THE BORDER BALLADS.

For other ballads in the spirit of the rugged courage of *Sir Patrick Spens* we may look to the border ballads, tinged though they are with the bravado spirit of their half outlaw life. This combination is well

shown in *Johnny Armstrong's Last Good-Night* with its bright picture of the outlaw's gallant entrance before the king and his ringing cry after the treachery dealt him—

“Fight on, fight on, my merry men all,
I am a little wounded, but I am not slain.
I'll lay me down to bleed awhile,
And then I'll rise and fight with you again.”

Such, too, was the courage of the women, if we may trust the tale in *Edom O'Gordon*, or *Captain Car*, that tells of a brave border woman who suffered death amid the ruins of her home by fire rather than “gie o'er” to a traitor. The ballad of *Kinmont Willie*, retouched by Scott, is a good introduction to his stories with its daring adventure and reckless fun. In the same spirit is the merry, romantic ballad of *Katharine Janfarie*, retold by Scott in merrier spirit still in *Lochinvar* with its rhythm so thoroughly in keeping with the gladness of the dashing adventure. Note-worthy among these border ballads are those two of loftier tone that tell of more than single combat, of the rush of battle in which every man is a hero—*Chevy Chase*, the one that could thrill Sir Philip Sidney “more than with a trumpet,” that Ben Jonson would rather have written than the whole of his works, and its splendid companion ballad *The Battle of Otterbourne*. The spirit of the men is shown by the stanza—

“For Witherington my heart was woe,
That ever he slain should be,
For when both his legs were hewn in two,
Yet he kneeled and fought on his knee;”

and of their leaders, by the dying words of the Douglas:

“But tell na ane of my brave men
That I lye bleeding wan,
But let the name of Douglas still
Be shouted in the van.”

We shall hardly find a modern poem of battle, unless it be *The Charge of the Light Brigade*, in which we are so thoroughly in the midst and thick of the fight and feel each soldier's jealousy for action as in these old fighting ballads of border life.

MODERN COMPARISONS.

The idea of heroism which these ballads express is worth keeping as the dominant idea in the literature selected for the teacher's reading to the class and for class study. Suggestive for comparison of ideals of heroism and for pure recreation are such modern poems of similar interest as *Horatius*, *The Ballad of the East and the West*, *The Charge of the Light Brigade* and others. For enthusiastic class study may surely be kept Tennyson's stirring poem of *The Revenge* with its bold fighting spirit and its character as a modern poem of distinctly old ballad material but not in old ballad form. Its situation is like one in the border bal-

lads, "the fight of the one and the fifty-three,"—the little *Revenge* of Sir Richard Grenville against the fifty-three Spanish galleons, huge sea castles—

"For half of their fleet to the right and half to the left were seen,
And the little *Revenge* ran on thro' the long sea-lane between."

No border ballad tells of fight more manful than that kept up for a day and a night, amid the serenity of nature, by the little *Revenge* and her lion-hearted captain. His is the indomitable spirit of the old border hero—

"For he said 'Fight on! fight on!'
Tho' his vessel was all but a wreck;

* * * *

And himself he was wounded again in the side and the head,
And he said 'Fight on! fight on!'

And something besides the old fighting spirit thrills in his dying words—

"I have fought for Queen and Faith like a valiant man and true;
I have only done my duty as a man is bound to do;
With a joyful spirit I, Sir Richard Grenville die!"

This is true poetic heroic material that in earlier days would have been sung from court to court and camp to camp in heroic ballad style. But no class can read aloud the story in Tennyson's fine form without giving appreciative response to that form, without rejoicing in the heroic spirit partly because of the thrill that comes from the spirited rhythm and sweep of the lines and the telling sound of the line rhymes and double rhymes, always in harmony with the progress of the fight, all together making the poem a-tingle with heroism. Then it is satisfying for pupils to read Sir Walter Raleigh's quaint account of the fight and know that poetry is keeping the truth of history, and—if one may credit a popular statement—satisfying for them to know, too, how a descendant of this Grenville line, Dr. Wilfred Grenfell, is carrying out the heroic tradition in modern ways of peace.

BALLADS OF OTHER TYPES

The ballads have also another interest as literature in the school. After the time of delight in the fairy world as the accepted reality of the fairy tale comes a time of conscious pleasure in its strangeness and suggestion of the supernatural. It is to this interest that folk plays, such as *Troll Magic* or *The Land of the Heart's Desire*, make their appeal. There are old ballads that express as genuinely the consciousness of the folk of a world of mystery about them and its fascinations for them. Some of them but give fairy lore pure and simple, as *Tom Thumb* and *The Wee, Wee Man*, the details interesting to study out and enjoy for themselves and in comparison with those in other poetry about fairies, as Allingham's *The Fairies* and passages from *The Midsummer Night's Dream*. Some of them give an interest more abiding, as *Young Tamlane*, with its tale of a mortal maid whose courage and love brave the terrors of the fairy

powers at midnight to win back her knight from the spell of fairy land, or *Thomas the Rhymmer*, that leads one almost to the entrance into the literature of symbolism with its suggestion of True Thomas's power of song and prophecy as no earthly gift. The details make a bright fairy lore: the queen of Elfland with her gown of "the grass green silk," the "fifty siller bells and nine," the "bonny road that winds about the ferny brae" in contrast to "the narrow road" "beset wi' thorns and briers," and even the "braid, braid road" "across the lily leven." But the price of the visit to Elfland, the gift it holds of "the tongue that canna lee," and the haunting thought in the lines—

"It was mirk, mirk night, and there was nae stern light,
And they waded through red bluid to the knee;
For a' the bluid that's shed on earth
Rins through the springs o' that countrie,"

suggests deeper things than fairy lore. And what reality and humor there are in the character of True Thomas who appreciates the difficulties of having "a tongue that canna lee" and breaks out with—

"My tongue is my ain—
A gudely gift ye wad' gie' to me!"

With this ballad it is interesting to read Kipling's ballad, *The Last Rhyme of True Thomas* for what it shows of modern interpretation and imagination building upon the old ballad material. From an enjoyment of the old ballad of the supernatural the way is not far to an appreciation later of the large meaning in the fine modern ballad of the supernatural, *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*. This type of ballad is perhaps the most difficult to handle but a teacher who understands a child's interest in the unusual and the mysterious may be able to gratify and direct it toward wholesome ends by her reading of some of these old ballads and of modern ones such as *Alice Brand* and *Lucy Gray* with its true touch of mystery.

A broad and more varied study of ballads would include those of other types—some of homely situations, riddle ballads, humorous domestic ballads and others. Is there a grade above the primary that would not enjoy *The King and the Abbot of Canterbury* for its picturesque situation depending upon the solving of riddles, its contrasts in character, the disguise, the dramatic ballad method of telling the story and the easy flow of the rhythm? Entertaining is it and worth while to compare with it the version of the story in the old Norse tale of *The Priest and the Clerk* with its ruder telling, homelier details, and sharper ending. There is merriment from disguise in the ballad of *The King and the Tanner of Tamworth* and good nonsense in *Get Up and Bar the Door* with its humanly stubborn domestic characters, and in *The Husband Who Was to Mind the House*, both favorites in old folk tale. One would put with these another picture of a homely and happier domestic scene in the lyric, *There's Nae Luck about the House*, like an old ballad in its freshness and spontaneity, differing as a lyric differs from a ballad.

OTHER PHASES OF BALLAD STUDY

It is not needful, perhaps not desirable, that all these ballads be read by the class. Some may better be read by the teacher, the minstrel for her class, if the art be hers to get into their spirit and read them in 'bold old ballad style.' Often she will find it well to summarize parts, keeping the more dramatic for reading aloud. Especially in the early part of ballad study may she more effectively develop an interest in ballads through her own reading, giving the pupils a chance to become familiar with the quaint older forms of expression and find pleasure in them from the beginning. Then they will find fewer difficulties in the comparatively modern forms in which the ballads appear in books for school use. These books usually give explanations of the words not modernized. However, it is well that the ballads be not modernized so far as to destroy their charm of quaintness. After children have once the older forms in mind they will keep them naturally and like the ballads better for the charm the old words give, as experience in the use of Howard Pyle's version of the Robin Hood tales would suggest. The old Scottish words are a wholesome addition to the reading vocabulary of eighth grade pupils for their tone of homely simplicity. They will be enjoyed the more if the teacher reads to them passages from the Scottish version of the *Twenty-Third Psalm* and others which give familiar thoughts a more appealing meaning from simple, intimate, homely expression. Is not all this one way of helping pupils to know the virtue in language, its living character, coming out of the heart of the everyday life of a people?

A study of the old ballads means more than a knowledge of old ballads and some modern ones, the story of ballad making and the background of social life it suggests; more, too, than a sharing in the virtues and ideals of that life. As ballad literature comes out of the old world of folk tale and romance it leads naturally into the greater world of epic, touches, too, upon the borderland of lyric and drama. Furthermore it means a rich contribution to the significance of a book and the worth of our hoard of English song in the treasury of the centuries. It is something to have had a vision of the beginnings of poetry and the living background to our books: the song making folk, the minstrel, whether the individual in the throng, the romantic figure of Scott's poetry, or the 'blind crowder' of the streets. It is worth while, too, to have enriched this vision with an understanding of the meaning for modern life of the broadside, the chap book, the collecting of ballads and the final published book—interests that connect with both the ideal in literature and the practical art of the print shop. But most worth while is ballad study if it lead more fully into the life and enjoyment of poetry and the large and liberal world of literature with a quickening of spirit to the beauty and truth of its living ideals.

BALLAD COLLECTIONS

FOR ELEMENTARY WORK:

Old English Ballads, Long. (D. C. Heath & Co.)

Ballads and Ballad Poetry, Hale. (Globe School Book Co.) Old and modern ballads.

The Boy's Percy, Lanier. (Scribners)

Robin Hood, Perkins. (Frederick A. Stokes & Co.) For illustrations.

The Children's Book of Ballads, Tileston. (Little Brown & Co.) Mostly modern ballads.

Heroic Ballads, Montgomery. (Ginn & Co.) Modern ballads and other poems.

FOR LATER INTEREST:

A Ballad Book, Bates. (Sibley & Co.)

Old English Ballads, Armes. (The Macmillan Co.)

Popular Ballads, Neilson and Witham. (Houghton, Mifflin & Co.)

The Ballad Book, Allingham. (The Macmillan Co.)

Old Ballads, Sidgwick. (Cambridge University Press.)

Old English Ballads, Kinard. (Silver, Burdett & Co.)

FOR MORE COMPLETE STUDY AND REFERENCE:

English and Scottish Ballads, Child. (School Edition, 4 vols. Houghton, Mifflin & Co.)

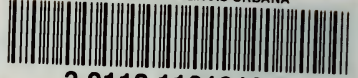
English and Scottish Popular Ballads, Sargent & Kittredge. (Houghton, Mifflin & Co.) A one volume selection from the collection by Professor Child.

Reliques of Ancient English and Scottish Poetry, Thomas Percy. (George Bell & Sons, London.)

Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border, Scott. (Adam and Charles Black, Edinburgh.)

Old English Ballads, Gummere. (Ginn & Co.)

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